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Pope attack directed by KGB, writer says

By Storer Rowley

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WASHINGTON — Last year's assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II was part of "an elaborate international plot" involving the Bulgarian secret service and the Soviet KGB, it was reported Monday.

The gunman, Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turkish terrorist, was neither a right-wing hit man nor a "crackpot" acting alone, as has been widely speculated, according to a copyrighted article in the September Reader's Digest.

"Key officials in every Western country concerned have told me privately that they believe the Soviet Union was behind the hidden forces that 'ran' Agca," wrote European journalist Claire Sterling in a 14-page article.

"A WIDESPREAD assumption in the West is that the Pope must have been shot because he is a Pole," she concludes. "Though Pope John Paul II is by no means an aggressive anti-Soviet hawk, he is undeniably the spiritual father of Poland's Solidarity trade union movement, which could never have been born without his blessing.

"As we have seen since martial law was declared in Poland, Solidarity is an intolerable threat to the very foundations of the Soviet empire."

In a wide-ranging article based on four months of study of Agca's mysterious past, Sterling reported that:

- Secret bank accounts were established in Agca's name as early as 1977 to finance his terrorist activities.

He spent \$50,000 on travel, plane fares and first class hotels in Europe's capitals in the year before he gunned down the Pope.

- The men who provided Agca with a forged passport and the 9 mm. Browning automatic he used in the attempt are known associates of Abuzer Ugurliu, the "Godfather" of an enormous gun-running ring based in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia and known as the "Turkish mafia." He is a man controlled by the Bulgarian secret service.

- Agca's Bulgarian connection dates back to the summer of 1980, when he spent 50 days in Sofia following a prison escape and obtained the intended murder weapon and, along with an alleged accomplice, two perfectly counterfeited, consecutively numbered Turkish passports.

"TO HAVE STAYED in Bulgaria for some 50 days, as Agca did, is enough in itself to raise suspicions about his future actions," Sterling said.

"Apart from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria is Europe's most inflexible communist police state. It is also one of Moscow's principal surrogates for terrorism and subversion.

"The Bulgarian secret service knows everything about Turks crossing the frontier, legally or otherwise. No Turk could loiter for long unobserved in Sofia, especially not somebody like Agca, a convicted fascist murderer whose picture had been feature on the front pages of the Turkish press for weeks on end."

Agca, now 23, a peasant Moslem who grew up near Malatya, a Turkish province capital, stunned the world when he shot and nearly killed Pope John Paul II as the pontiff waved to a crowd from his open car in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.